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[USNHO Dietitian Keeps Sailors and Marines Ready for the Fight](#)

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By Joe Andes, U.S. Naval Hospital Okinawa, Japan Public Affairs Officer



160307-N-TC859-015 CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa (March 07, 2016) United States Naval Hospital Okinawa, Japan Clinical Dietitian Lieutenant Michael Kantar prepares for his segment on the Marine Corps Community Services Television show “Community Connections”. Kantar made an appearance on the talk show discussing the importance nutrition and healthy eating for service members and demonstrated some recipes for healthy snacks. Left to right: Marine Corps Community Services (MCCS) Television host Kathy Millette, MCCS Health Promotions Wellness Educator Lydia Dahl, United States Naval Hospital Okinawa, Japan Clinical Dietitian LT Michael Kantar. (U.S. Navy photo by Joe Andes, U.S. Naval Hospital Okinawa, Japan Public Affairs Officer)

When it comes to mission readiness, fitness is a key component. For Marines and Sailors in the fleet, eating right and staying fit are just as important as maintaining weapons and equipment.

“Active-duty members are not only expected to maintain a higher level of health and fitness compared to their civilian counter parts, we are expected to perform on a moment’s notice,” said Lieutenant Michael Kantar, a clinical dietitian at United States Naval Hospital Okinawa, Japan. “Hence, active-duty members need to be fitter, healthier, and have a concrete nutrition base to handle any battle which they may encounter.”

According to the 2015 Marine Corps Demographic Update, men are the vast majority of Navy Medicine’s active duty beneficiary population, comprising 82 percent of the Navy and 92 percent of the Marine Corps. With such a large number of men serving as Sailors and Marines, it is essential they have a number of resources available to them to stay healthy, ready and on the job.

“Aside from monthly classes I offer at the hospital, I have opportunities to provide topic specific briefs and educational classes such as performance nutrition to any group on island as long as I have sufficient notification,” said Kantar. “As for my approach, my presentation for active-duty differs from civilians because I focus on mission readiness.”

Recently, Kantar went aboard the U.S.S. Germantown to brief Sailors on the link between nutrition and readiness. He also stressed to the crew the role a proper diet plays in overcoming the unique challenges of military life.

“Each day, active-duty members encounter significant bouts of physical, emotional, and psychological stress,” said Kantar. “How, when, and what one eats can significantly impact how a member handles a situation. There have been a number of studies which have observed an inverse correlation between stress management and diet. As one’s diet quality declines their ability to manage stress follows.”

Kantar also conducts briefings and classes for Marine Corps units on Okinawa. He’s even appeared on a local talk show that airs on the Marine Corps Community Services Okinawa television channel.

“Some of the topics I have discussed to date with active-duty members have focused on returning back to basics with eating, using the “Go for Green” program available in Navy galleys and some Marine Corp mess halls, eating healthy on a ship or in the barracks, supplement safety, and foods to fuel optimal performance,” said Kantar.

Kantar also aims to educate service members on the long-term impact of nutrition in their lives. Proper nutrition, especially combined with exercise, can often curb or eliminate issues like heart disease or stroke. He says that this can sometimes be challenging as many younger men don’t necessarily feel or see the consequences which might stem from poor dietary choices.

“With the average age of our enlisted active-duty members being in their low to mid-twenties, their prospective health outcomes may not be as high of a concern as it may be for an individual in their mid-thirties,” said Kantar. “Nutrition and health is a continuum, meaning that one’s diet over a lifetime is molded by the day to day choices made. It is very rare to develop a nutrition or lifestyle condition overnight. It takes a series of weeks, months, or years for a condition to arise.”

According to Kantar, education regarding nutrition and knowledge about what men put into their bodies is essential to developing and maintaining a proper diet. However not all nutrition education out there is created the same. Kantar advises people to steer clear of diets, eating patterns, or food related messages which sound too good to be true.

“Radical changes to one’s lifestyle or habits can lead to emotional letdown and ultimately abandonment of the pursuit to change,” said Kantar. “This is the core reason why fad-diets or radical elimination of food groups rarely, if ever, work. Both approaches set very unrealistic goals and expectations which may not parallel with your lifestyle.”

Science proves that healthy eating involves having a variety of foods from all the major food groups and having a planned splurge food at least once a day in portion controlled amounts. Kantar stresses the importance of reputable nutrition information. “Check to see if the information was obtained from a Registered Dietitian or governmental organization such as choosemyplate.gov,” said Kantar. He says an even better option to learn more about healthy eating is to talk to a dietitian.

“A Registered Dietitian provides the facts on what does and does not work,” says Kantar. “A dietitian will also tailor the most up to date and accurate recommendations to an individual’s unique lifestyle, choices, and means of living.”

Kantar’s goal is to get people to invest as much time in creating meal plans, shopping for healthful foods, cooking at home, and living an overall healthy lifestyle as they would if they were planning a vacation or purchasing a new car. “We need to take the same meticulous approaches and time for eating healthfully as we do for the luxuries of living,” said Kantar. “It is of utmost importance that we restructure the priorities and values of life to make healthful eating one closest to the top and not an afterthought”.

For resources and tools on healthy eating, visit:

<http://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcphc/health-promotion/healthy-eating/Pages/healthy-eating.aspx> .

<http://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcphc/health-promotion/Pages/default.aspx> .

U. S. Naval Hospital Okinawa is the largest overseas military treatment facility in the Navy, serving a beneficiary population of 55,000 active duty personnel, family members, civilian employees, contract personnel, and retirees. The facility also provides referral services for over 189,000 beneficiaries throughout the western Pacific.

For more news and information about U. S. Naval Hospital Okinawa, visit our web page at www.navy.mil/sites/nhoki or our official Facebook page at www.facebook.com/usnho .

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